

MISSOURI FARM BILL HEARING

**Presented to:
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry**

**Southeast Missouri State University
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Introduction

On behalf of the National Sorghum Producers, I would like to thank the Senate Agriculture Committee for the opportunity to discuss the farm bill and its impact on the sorghum industry and my farm.

My name is Ron Beetsma. I serve on the Delegate Body of the National Sorghum Producers (NSP) and I farm 6,500 acres with my brother and my two sons. We farm 1200 acres of grain sorghum or milo, 3,700 acres of corn and 1,600 acres of soybeans. Missouri ranks fourth in the nation in the number of sorghum farmers with more than 2,000.

We are involved in three farmer owned ethanol plants, a farmer-owned biodiesel plant, a farmer-owned food processing company, and we also participate in Missouri's Food and Fiber group that produces Identity Preserved commodities. Our marginal area is well suited for sorghum production and we can be profitable by using fewer inputs than other crops. Sorghum also plays a role in the valued-added market for our farm as we sell a large portion of our production for use in birdseed.

NSP represents U.S. sorghum producers nationwide. Our organization is headquartered in Lubbock, Texas, and our major responsibilities are to increase the profitability of sorghum producers through market development, research, education, and legislative representation.

NSP is committed to work with the Committee and its staff as it works to reauthorize our nation's farm laws. The organization and industry is very supportive of the current farm bill. However, we believe that Congress can clarify rules so that USDA interpretation does not impacts producers' ability to use sorghum in a profitable cropping system.

A Brief Description of Sorghum

I would like to give you a brief history of sorghum and outline for you some of the unique opportunities that we have in sorghum. Sorghum originated in Africa and continues to be a staple in the diet of many Africans. Benjamin Franklin first introduced sorghum to the United States in 1725. In the 1850s, the U.S. government began introducing various forage varieties from China and Africa.

This versatile crop is used both in human food systems and, primarily in the United States, as an animal feed. It is currently a non-GMO crop though NSP supports work on moving new technologies into the crop. Industrially, sorghum, like corn, is valued for its starch content. A prime example of this is the ethanol industry, which can use both corn and sorghum interchangeably in ethanol production. Its co-product, distiller's grain, is a valuable and widely accepted feed for both cattle feeders and dairies.

Industry Overview

The U.S. grain sorghum belt is primarily made up of nine states in the Great Plains, although grain sorghum is grown from California to New Jersey. Sorghum is produced in many of the states that you represent. This includes Kansas, Nebraska, Mississippi,



Missouri, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Colorado, and California. Over the past ten years, grain sorghum has ranged from a high of 13.1 million acres in 1996 to a low of 6.2 million acres planted in 2006. Production from the last 10 years has ranged from 360 million bushels to 795 million bushels, with an approximate value of 1.1 billion dollars annually. In addition, sorghum utilized as silage, hay and grazing represents another 5 million acres of production. The USDA reported that in 2005, 311,000 acres of sorghum were harvested for silage, producing approximately 3.5 million tons of silage.

The U.S. is the world's chief producer and exporter of grain sorghum, and the crop ranks fifth in importance as a U.S. crop behind corn, cotton, soybeans and wheat. Roughly 45% of the crop is exported. Of the 55% of the crop that is not exported, 36% goes into pork, poultry, and cattle feed; 15% goes into ethanol production; 3% goes into industrial use; and 1% goes into the food chain. In fact, sorghum's newest market is the exponentially growing ethanol industry. We saw a 57 percent increase in the last 2 years.

Worldwide, approximately half of total production of grain sorghum is consumed directly as human food. In addition, the U.S. dominates world seed production in sorghum with a billion dollar seed industry focused on 250,000 acres primarily in the Texas Panhandle.

Sorghum is a unique, drought tolerant crop that is a vital component in cropping rotations for many U.S. farmers.

Title 1 -Commodity Programs

We support a commodity title that is based upon direct, loan and counter-cyclical payments. If a WTO agreement requires a change to our farm programs, the direct payments and loan rates are most important to my farm safety net. Direct payments are significant since we would receive a payment if we had a crop failure. If WTO does require the scaling back of domestic support, we would ask that the Committee preserve the equitable relationships in farm program payments and payment rates for feed grains.

In preparation for the reauthorizing of farm laws, there has been a lot of discussion about what a Green Box farm proposal would look like and how it would operate. This task has been more difficult than we anticipated since the program cannot be based on price or production. Because of that fact, we ask that any new programs that may be developed or discussed to replace the current Commodity Title be thoroughly vetted with the agriculture industry after we fully understand any potential WTO agreement.

If revenue assurance becomes part of serious policy debate, then it will be important for Members of the Agriculture Committee to understand that drought can impact the baseline period for certain regions like mine. Seventy percent of a zero yield is still zero revenue - no matter how high the price. This method of delivering farm benefits may not be "bankable" to many lenders.

Title II - Conservation Policy

NSP applauds the committee for giving serious consideration to the future of water supplies in the semi-arid regions of the Plains, a region highly dependent upon sorghum, by creating the Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program as part of the



Environmental Quality Incentive Programs (EQIP). However, more can and must be done to conserve water in the country's semi-arid agricultural producing region. NSP leadership believes that water quantity issues will continue to grow in importance and urgency as non-agricultural uses compete with agricultural uses in the sorghum belt.

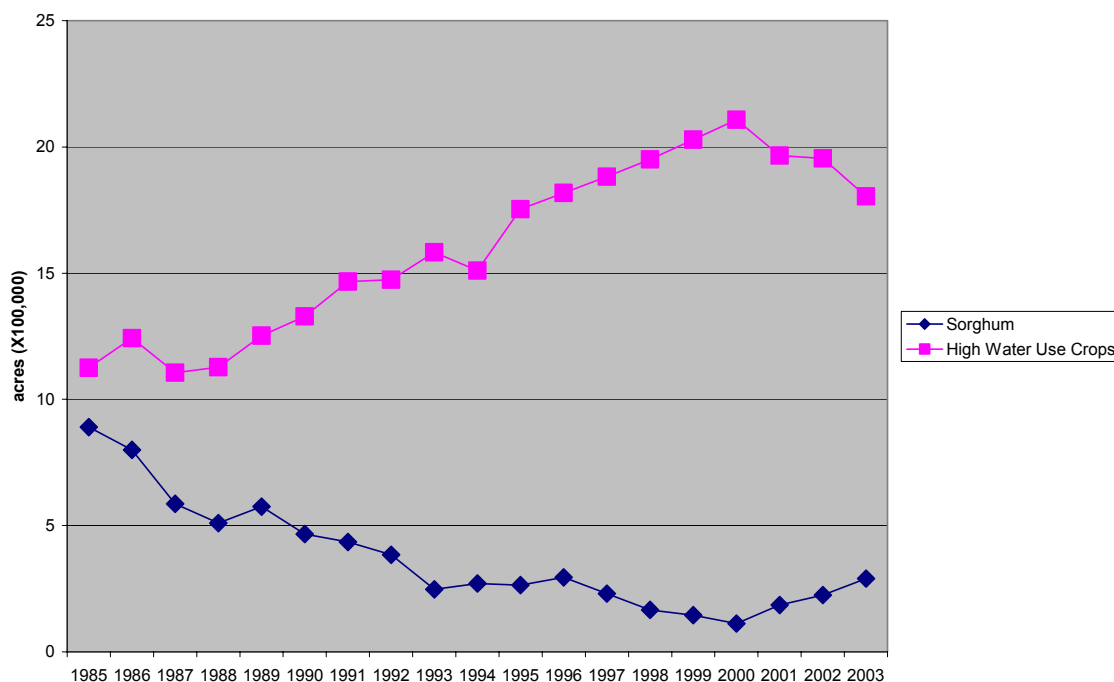
Water Use is Increasing

Sorghum is known as a “water-sipping” crop. According to research conducted at the USDA Agricultural Research Service facility in Bushland, Texas, sorghum uses approximately 1/3 less water than either corn or soybeans, and 15% less water than wheat. It is a crop that is adapted to semi-arid agricultural regions; that is, regions that may receive less than 20 inches of rain a year or in higher rainfall areas that have soils with poor water holding capabilities. Corn and soybeans, on the other hand, are primarily grown in areas that receive 30-40 inches of rain a year. Because of its excellent drought tolerance and varied uses, sorghum is a viable option for producers in the Plains states.

Demand for water is increasing in the semi-arid regions of the U.S., especially for non-agricultural uses. NSP is concerned that the demand for water for both agriculture and non-agriculture use could create a climate of tension that is not productive for either group. Since 1985, five million acres of high water-use crops have replaced sorghum acres throughout the country. A prime example of this is Western Kansas, which has had serious drought for the last 5 years. Yet, irrigated acres for high water-use crops continue to increase. As a result, since 1985, Western Kansas has lost 600,000 planted acres of irrigated sorghum. Sorghum producers in Kansas and in other sorghum states believe that this trend needs to be reversed. The following chart shows the decrease in sorghum acres and the increase in higher water-use crops (USDA, NASS 2003 data).



high water use crops compared to sorghum



Increasing water demand for agricultural and non-agricultural use is also a global concern. According to the National Water Research Institute (NWRI), 25 percent of the world's population will be facing a severe water shortage by 2025. However, the NWRI says that 50 percent of the increase in demand for water by 2025 can be met by increasing the effectiveness of irrigation and by growing more water-use efficient crops like sorghum. This projection shows that appropriate crop selection and conservation efforts can save water.

Policy Changes

We have some particular concerns that we would like to share with the subcommittee in our efforts to strengthen federal government support for sorghum. Unfortunately, concentrating solely on improving irrigation technologies and increasing efficiencies does not necessarily translate into less water usage. NSP supports conservation programs that encourage planting of appropriate crops based on decisions that are environmentally sustainable and market driven. **Overall, NSP believes that Congress and USDA need to emphasize water quantity, as part of water management, in both current and future conservation programs.**

How Much Water Can be Saved?

A Regional Water Plan prepared for the Texas Panhandle Water Planning Group in Amarillo, Texas, has found that the water savings over 50 years for 524,243 acres spread over 21 counties in the Texas Panhandle would amount to 7,360,000 acre-feet of water if irrigated corn acreage were converted to irrigated sorghum. On average, that's 147,200 acre-feet saved per year. An acre-foot of water equals 325,850 gallons, roughly enough to



supply two, four-person homes with water for a year. Theoretically, this 50-year water savings would amount to 147,200 acre-feet per year, enough to supply water to 294,400 four-person homes in a year. For reference, the city of Austin, Texas, has 276,842 housing units and a population of 642,994, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

On a broader geographic basis, the economic impact of converting irrigated corn and soybean acreage in the semi-arid regions to grain sorghum could be astounding. As you can see, encouraging the production of crops that are suited for a given area can save an enormous amount of water.

Current Water Situation

Currently, agriculture uses approximately 95% of the water drawn from the Ogallala Aquifer. Towns and cities within the region have aggressively educated citizens and in some cases implemented new laws that are forcing homeowners and businesses to conserve water. According to NRCS's National Water Management Center (NWMC), water use for irrigation has increased by 125% over the past fifty years. NWMC also found that some aquifers have been permanently damaged because the full recharge of depleted aquifers storage may not be possible where compaction and subsidence has occurred. The sorghum belt remains in a long-term drought, and the water table continues to drop as ground water supplies dwindle. NSP encourages NWMC to proactively consider long-range planning that focuses on ground water, because agricultural and non-agricultural users are critically dependent on water.

Because of these concerns, NSP encourages the subcommittee to promote conservation programs that save water. We have members that tell the organization that they find that they use more total water as they increase the efficiencies of their existing irrigation and add more new irrigation systems. NSP views this as contrary to the goals of a program like the Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program, and contrary to the best interests of producers. We believe that the best way to conserve water is to lower the amount of water used within an agricultural system, not to just improve irrigation delivery technologies.

Improving Current Programs

NSP has encouraged USDA to develop a Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program that includes support for cost share-funds to significantly increase water conservation. NSP believes that EQIP and other conservation programs should be playing an integral part of a system-wide approach that encourages and rewards lower water consumption. For example, the program could encourage producers to change from an irrigated high water use crop that on average uses 30 inches of irrigated water from a center-pivot watering 125 acres, to dry-land sorghum. This would save 3750 acre-inches of water a growing season. An incentive equal to the difference between irrigated land rental rates and dry-land rental rates could entice farmers to make the conversion and help save water.

NSP members are concerned that concentrating solely on the use of efficient irrigation technologies may actually lead to an increase in overall water use. NSP leadership



believes that the main priority of conservation programs should be to provide incentives to farmers to recharge ground water by lowering water use. With that in mind, another significant water saving conversion would be the production of less water intensive crops on irrigated land. Using our center-pivot irrigation example previously mentioned, switching from a high use water crop to a water sipping crop saves over 912 acre inches of water a growing season. NSP members believe that an incentive to compensate farmers for changing to a less water intensive crop would result in significant water conservation. NSP urges NRCS to work with the local office and state committees to accurately determine the appropriate payment rate for different regions of the U.S.

Title IX – Energy

Sorghum can, and does, play an important role as a feedstock in the renewable fuels industry. The sorghum industry fully supports the President's call to replace 75% of our imported petroleum products with domestic energy sources, like ethanol, by 2025. The sorghum industry believes that the federal government should provide significant research resources, as stated by the President, to the development of cutting-edge methodology for producing renewable biofuels. These technologies must be both economically competitive and feasible in order to meet the stated goal of reducing our "addiction" to fossil fuel by 2025.

The sorghum industry encourages the Agriculture Committees of both the House and Senate to present bold energy concepts and ideas when it re-authorizes the Energy Title of our nation's farm laws.

Background on Sorghum in the Ethanol Industry

Currently, 15% of the grain sorghum crop is used by the ethanol industry to make ethanol. That production provides a source of ethanol and jobs outside of the traditional Corn Belt. Ethanol processing plants routinely mix corn and sorghum together in the production of ethanol. Expanding ethanol production outside of the traditional Corn Belt is a priority for the sorghum industry. Sorghum producers are working to expand their role in the renewable fuels industry.

Biofuels production in the United States has been fairly limited to the use of grain for production of ethanol. Research efforts within the United States have focused on improving efficiencies of the use of grains through optimization of enzyme technologies and feedstock improvements. Worldwide, sugar to ethanol has been the predominant source of ethanol production in countries such as Brazil and India. In fact, 61% of the total world production of ethanol is sugar-based, from crops such as sugarcane, sugar beets, and sweet sorghum. Brazil has said publicly that it will be self-sufficient in its energy needs based on their production of ethanol. The USDA and the Department of Energy have been investigating the use of biomass for production of biofuels. That research should translate into any crop that produces high biomass yields.

Sorghum has a unique role in bioenergy since it can and does fit into all three schemes for production of biofuels: grain, sugar-based, and biomass feed stocks. Hybrid grain sorghum is routinely used as a grain feedstock in the U.S., sweet sorghum is used widely



as a sugar feedstock in India and China, and the potential to produce high tonnage biomass from sorghum silages is well documented in our forage industry in the U.S.

Starch to Ethanol Production

In the U.S., almost all of the current ethanol production is based on starch conversion, using primarily corn and sorghum grain, to produce ethanol. To the ethanol production process, starch is starch; it does not matter if the starch comes from corn or sorghum. Both starch sources yield identical amounts of ethanol from a bushel, and the distiller's grain has almost identical nutritional value when it is fed to livestock.

Sugar-Based Conversion to Ethanol

Brazil has become self-sufficient in ethanol through its use of sugarcane as a sugar feedstock. France has been producing sugar beets for use in conversion to ethanol. An additional world and U.S. player as a sugar-based feedstock for ethanol production is sweet sorghum.

Most Americans know of sweet sorghum as the type that is used to make syrup or molasses. In addition, it is also used worldwide in the production of ethanol. India and China are producing ethanol from sweet sorghum. DOE is currently supporting a sweet sorghum pilot study in Florida to explore the potential of sweet sorghums as a sugar feedstock for ethanol production.

Under current systems, the sweet sorghum is harvested, and then the stems are crushed and juice extracted at a mill, similar to sugarcane. Some harvesters, though not economically viable at this time, are being developed to extract the juice in one operation and leave the residue, called bagasse, in the field to be gathered at a later time. Once the juice is extracted, it is fermented and ethanol is produced. This ethanol is then distilled and dehydrated using the same equipment that is being used in ethanol production from starch sources.

Very little sugar from sweet sorghum, sugar beets, or sugarcane is used in the U.S. as a feedstock for a renewable fuel. Sweet sorghum would complement both sugarcane and sugar beets as a feedstock in a renewable fuels plant. In comparison to sugarcane, sweet sorghum has similar sugar content (9-11% for sweet sorghum, 12-14% for sugarcane, 15-20% for sugar beets). Sugarcane takes approximately 11 months to mature to harvest, while sweet sorghums take 90-120 days and can be harvested multiple times throughout the year. Since sweet sorghum's production cycles are on a different timeline than sugarcane, it would be available as a feedstock to an ethanol plant until its supply of sugarcane comes online.

Research data from India shows the production yields of ethanol from sugarcane and sweet sorghum as almost identical. Production figures estimate roughly 1,150 gallons of ethanol per acre from either crop. In order to produce enough renewable energy to replace our need for fossil fuels, 131 million acres of sugar production would be needed. That would be a 70-fold increase from the current production of 2 million acres of



sugarcane and sugar beets and 25,000 to 30,000 sweet sorghum acres produced in the southeastern U.S.

Forage Sorghum's Role in Biomass

Forage sorghums can play a significant role in both cellulosic and lignocellulosic technologies that produce ethanol from biomass. Biomass production is based on utilizing the whole plant (or other organic waste) by breaking down most of the plant's major biological components to produce ethanol. In most cases, tons per acre of convertible biomass would drive the feedstock equation in the conversion to ethanol.

The federal government has been conducting research on the role of switchgrass in biomass production. Switchgrass and sorghum are both from the family Poaceae and probably diverged from each other sometime before the divergence between sorghum and corn. Switchgrass is a perennial plant that can spread by both seed and rhizomes. Though sorghum is thought to be primarily an annual plant, there are related species that are also rhizomatous and perennial. Both plants have open panicles and can be tall and very leafy. Forage sorghums excel in water use efficiency.

Conclusion

You have a big challenge on your hands rewriting our Nation's farm laws and I expect that farm policy in the next five years will look significantly different than it does today because of a potential WTO agreement, efforts to cut the deficient and increased interest in the Energy Title of the farm bill. My industry looks forward to working with you during these efforts. Again, thank you for your interest in sorghum.